

OLIVA SABUCO, A CONTROVERSIAL CHARACTER

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ABSTRACT

The main goal of this paper is to highlight the serious difficulties that researchers still find nowadays on any subject when they want to contrast the different information they find in the sources, both bibliographic and digital, where there is a lot of information that in many cases it is usually wrong or is clearly incompatible with that of other sources also consulted. Un example of this assert is constituted by the biography of a Spanish woman of the sixteenth century, Oliva Sabuco, from whom some sources claim that she was a pharmacist, mathematician, philosopher and scholar, while others deny some or all of these characteristics. In any case, she can be considered as a referent of woman who fought hard against the gender difficulties she suffered.

KEYWORDS: Contrast of information, errors in the sources, gender difficulties, 16th century Spanish women, Oliva Sabuco.

INTRODUCTION

Among others, two basic things are necessary to accurately communicate information or news that is available, without inducing error or confusion among the possible recipients of it. One, the use of adequate means. The other, to be sure that that's information is reliable. Otherwise, the one who receives could be being cheated.

This comes to mind because not everything that one finds in any media has the credit of being considered true nor one can trust everything that is read, heard, written or appears in any other way in a media.

As an example of this assert, we show that from the many bibliographical sources consulted on the life and work of the sixteen century Albacete woman (born in Alcaraz) Oliva Sabuco, cataloged by several of them as apothecary, mathematician, philosopher and scholar, an almost total ignorance on this woman is deduced, but not by lack of data, but on the contrary, because even if there are many of them, most are incompatible with each other depending on the source in which it is looked for.

Thus, there exists a great controversy on the surnames and occupation of his father, in those of herself, in the number of her brothers, in knowing if she studied, when she married, how many children she had and above all, about her scientific work: "The New Philosophy", of which there are numerous

doubts about its authorship, doubts that continue to persist today, although more than four centuries have already passed since her existence.

This paper is structured as follows: the following section shows the data obtained in the different bibliographic and digital sources on the life of Oliva Sabuco, data that are usually different depending on the source consulted. In section 2, some of the author's reflections on the great controversies that this previous fact usually gives rise to are discussed.

2. Oliva Sabuco: is really her biography true?

According to the Baptism Book of the Parish of the Holy Trinity of Alcaraz, Oliva Sabuco (Sabuco, from here on) was born in Alcaraz, a Spanish municipality belonging to the province of Albacete, within the actual Autonomous Community of Castilla-La Mancha, on December 2, 1562. She was a daughter of Bachelor Miguel Sánchez-Sabuco and Peña Rubio and Francisca de Cózar and was named Luisa Oliva Sabuco de Nantes Barrera. From that book it is known that their surnames Nantes and Barrera come from who were their baptismal godmothers, Bernardina de Nantes and Bárbara Barrera.

However, there exists a great controversy in the literature concerning the life of both Sabuco and her family, especially her father, Miguel Sabuco. Thus, for example, there is no unanimity about the father's name and surnames. Whereas some sources grant those already mentioned [3], Álvarez appears as a second surname in others and in most of them the first surname does not appear. On the other hand, it is believed that he was probably born in Alcaraz, and that he was a bachelor in Philosophy and was an apothecary, although all this has not been documented either [3].

What is known with certainty is that Miguel Sabuco lived in Alcaraz between 1550 and 1595, and that during that time he was one of the most relevant and popular characters in the city. In 1563, he was elected trustee and solicitor of the same and almost thirty years later, on October 7, 1590, he was also appointed lawyer of the city. His brother Alonso, uncle of Sabuco, was an apothecary. Therefore, the Sabuco constituted an important and influential family of Alcaraz.

According to some sources, [3] for example, Sabuco was the youngest of the six children of the marriage, while for others [5] for instance, she was the fifth of eight brothers. She was soon orphaned by a mother and her father married a woman also from Vianos (Albacete), as his first wife, but younger and poor: Ana García Navarro. Therefore, Sabuco really should have been called Luisa Oliva Sabuco Cózar, but in one of her books (although that authorship is also not clear, as will be seen in next paragraphs), the "New Philosophy", also appears, as already indicated, with the Nantes and Barrier surnames of her godmothers.

There is no source that affirms that Sabuco was studying, although in all of them it is indicated that she could be trained at home, and that she undoubtedly benefited from the illustrated gatherings that her father organized in Alcaraz, in which a neighbor of them participated, the humanist Pedro Simón

Abril, prestigious professor of Grammar and Rhetoric, who in 1583 joined the University of Zaragoza. It seems to be that Abril was Sabuco's preceptor between 1578 and 1583. It is very possible, since that was the only way for Sabuco to acquire a training, because at that time official academic studies were prohibited for women.

In this point, it is convenient to note that there are also many gaps in the literature about Professor Pedro Simón Abril, born just like Sabuco in Alcaraz, in 1530. The few biographical data that are known about him are due to the dedications he included in his works. Thus, from the dedication of his "Poetic Art" of 1573 it follows that he was raised by his uncle Alonso Simón, a doctor who taught him the Latin language and transmitted the passion for letters. It is not known in which University he studied Philosophy and Mathematics, probably in Valencia. He devoted himself entirely to teaching, an activity he developed in several places. In 1570 the University of Huesca got an order of excommunication against him for teaching subjects exclusive to that university (Arts and Philosophy). Abril was declared blunt and excommunicated, although the following year he was acquitted. In 1583 he was named one of the first academics of the University of Zaragoza, where he taught Latinity, Greek and Rhetoric. He died in Medina de Rioseco (Valladolid) in 1595 [21]-[22].

Despite the ignorance that exists about his life, Abril has been one of the most important figures of Spanish Humanism. Humanist, hellenist, pedagogue and translator are some of the facets of his intellectual work (see Figure 1). The true extent of his bibliography has also sparked strong debates among historians.



Figure 1: Cover of one of the Abril translations

Regarding Abril as a pedagogue, he wrote one of the works that has given him the most fame, the "Notes on how doctrines should be reformed and how to teach them" in 1589, which he directed to Philip II. This work is precisely the most interesting from the point of view of the history of science. In it, he defends the role of Mathematics as a general foundation of scientific knowledge, and affirms in this regard that "men should not be allowed to pass to any kind of science, without first learning the mathematical doctrines".

Moving now on Sabuco (Figure 2), she married Acacio de Buedo on a date not yet proven: 1580. According to some sources, [19] among others, the exact date was December 18 of that year. In other sources that date is not indicated, [20] for instance, and [5] points out that the marriage was celebrated on December 26, 1585. Valero indicates that this marriage took place seven months after that of his father with Ana García Navarro, who curiously appears in the admonitions such as Ana Navarra [20].

Sabuco's marriage to Acacio, son of Luis Hernández Salinero and Catalina de Buedo, as outlined in a note aside from the admonitions contained in a Register Book of the Holy Trinity Parish in Alcaraz [20], had at least four children [19], while Ferrer [] states that Sabuco had a daughter, Luisa, who married Miguel de Pareja in 1622, son of Miguel Sabuco Peñarrubia and Magdalena de Soto (most likely a cousin her, his name was just like his grandfather). Acacio held several public offices in Alcaraz, and the couple had a relaxed position, bequeathing substantial gifts to their children.



Figure 2: Oliva Sabuco

The controversy surrounding Sabuco continues with the theme of her scientific work. She is credited with the authorship of the book, of full title "New philosophy of the nature of man, not reached by the great ancient philosophers, which improves life and human health" published in Madrid by the editor P. Madrigal in 1587, preceded by a dedication letter to the King Our Lord, in which the author declares herself humble servant and vassal, begging the king on his knees to favor as a gentleman of high

prosopias to women in their adventures. The book, better known today for its abbreviated title "New philosophy of the nature of man" (or, simply, "New philosophy"), was consigned almost two years before the long process to authorize the work, compose its typography and print it, being the privilege of the King of July 1586.

At first it was thought that this book had been really written by Sabuco, until this authorship began to be questioned by some researchers at the beginning of the 20th century. Although the issue remains unresolved, it is accepted as a more likely hypothesis, based on the data and conjectures provided by José Marco Hidalgo [11] and Bernardo Marcos [12], that the true author of the work was his father, Bachelor Miguel Sabuco, who could have used his daughter's name to avoid complications with the Court of the Holy Office.

The opinions of these two researchers are based on the fact that in the testament of Miguel Sabuco Álvarez, discovered by one of them, the registrar José Marco Hidalgo, in 1903, he declares in 1588 to have married his daughter Luisa de Oliva with Acacio de Buedo, a neighbor of Alcaraz, granting them an excessive dowry to the detriment of the rest of their children, so they later went into litigation and settled "for the sake of peace." He also declares to be the author of the "New Philosophy" where he puts the author Luisa de Oliva, his daughter, "just for giving her the name and honor", reserving the fruit and profit that will result from such books for herself, and asking his daughter Luisa for not interfering in the mentioned privilege, "under penalty of curse."

However, it is possible that Miguel, who had distanced himself from his daughter after having married a young woman the same age as her and had refused to pay Acacio de Buedo the dowry that corresponded to him and was denounced for that reason by him, he made that will and declared notarially, just a year after the work appeared and before that it acquired all the fame that it would soon enjoy, that such a work was only her. He excused having falsely presented his daughter as an author, indicating that he did so to give her the literary glory, reserving the economic fruits of the commercialization of the work, fruits that Miguel Sabuco aspired to bequeathed in inheritance to his new young wife and son from both. As already stated, he specified that his daughter would incur her disgust and curse if she prevented it. In addition, it is also possible that Miguel initially feared the possibility of being denounced as a heretic and preferred that, if this were the case, it would be his daughter who faced the justice of the Kingdom, a danger that when the work was authorized by the King already disappeared.

In any case and as it has been indicated, several opinions can be found in the literature for and against the authorship of the work by a father or daughter, although the majority are not well founded. In the comments to Ferrer's contribution [5] on Sabuco in the blog, the following text, anonymously written on August 21, 2018 can be read

Oliva Sabuco's will has appeared. She did it on February 13, 1643, shortly before she died. Its content as well as a rigorous investigation about the last years of her life are the basis of the latest publication on this woman. Obviously, they are the most reliable. The book is entitled "Testament and last will of Mrs. Oliva Sabuco". I think that after reading it there are no doubts about the authorship of the "New Philosophy".

There are also other theories regarding the authorship of this work. Thus, in some sources it is indicated that there is a possibility that both the father and the daughter lacked the necessary knowledge to write it, so it could have been ceded to them by Pedro Simón Abril, or bought or stolen to him after he would compose it or integrate it with Latin fragments of Luis Vives.

In any case, whoever its author may be, the New Philosophy was widely disseminated, having numerous reissues over the course of four centuries. In 1588 the first appeared, which was censored and crossed out by the Court of the Holy Office. The same happened with another later edition of 1622, in Portuguese, published in Braga. The edition of 1728 again in Madrid, was accompanied by a eulogy of the famous doctor Martín Martínez, although it was also expunged. Later, in the Ribadeneyra Library, a fragmentary version of the original was reproduced; in 1847 the best known part of the work was published, corresponding to the psychology of the passions, and it was made from the text corresponding to the 1728 edition. Already in the second half of the nineteenth century there is an edition in 1873, another in Paris (1886) and that same year another in Madrid (1886). All of them focused on treaties that refer to passions. It also had early translations and the 21st century edition in English, Illinois (United States), 2006.



Figure 3: Cover of "The New Philosophy... by Oliva Sabuco

From the point of view of natural philosophy and the history of medicine, this work deserves great recognition for several reasons. In the first place, it represents a radical refutation of the scientific content of Galenism, at a time when Galenic doctrine was the main foundation of the knowledge and practices of medicine throughout the Western world. Secondly, it provides an incipient psychosomatic conception of health, disease and therapeutics, unprecedented during the previous tradition, in which the psychological dimension of physiological phenomena and diseases occupied a fundamental position. And finally, it contains the first known formulation of the "succus nervus" doctrine".

The work, whose original cover appears in Figure 3, consists essentially of two nuncupatory epistles (that is, dedicated to a particular person, five dialogues (two scientific-philosophical and three about medicine) in Spanish and two booklets in Latin. The first epistle is a "Letter dedicated to the Our King Lord". The second, addressed to the illustrious Mr. Francisco Zapata, is a "Letter in which she asks for amparo and favor against the prompts of this book. All of them is continued by five dialogues between three pastors-philosophers, Antonio (representing the opinion of the author), Rodonio and Veronio, and a doctor, named doctor, in the three dialogues on medical issues. All the work strongly attacks the traditional medicine of Aristotle, Hippocrates and Galen, considering that it is wrong and must be overcome.

The first dialogue is entitled "Colloquium of self-knowledge" and deals with medicine and psychology, providing sanitary and spiritual norms to avoid disease and prolong life. The second is "Colloquium" which constitutes a broad treatise on the philosophy of Nature and Cosmology. The third is entitled "Colloquium of the things that will improve this world and its republics" and deals with the construction of the state, with a strong renovating content in the political-social. The fourth is the "Colloquium of the aids or remedies of the true medicine", a brief treatise in which the idea that the human being is not always one or always the same, but that their conditions change according to their affections. And finally, the fifth is entitled "Vera medicine and vera philosophy, hidden from the ancients, composed of two dialogues", which, despite its title, is one, in which two purposes are proposed: to demonstrate that "the medicine that is used is wrong in its main foundations", and show the world the real medicine, in order to avoid early or violent death.

The booklet "Dicta brevia circa naturam hominis, Medicinae Fundamentum", in Latin, is a collection of adages or brief sentences about the nature of man as the root of medicine. Among these sentences are the following: "The spirit in calm and stillness is wise." "For the knowledge of himself, a good part is knowing man his affections and the things that cause him health and illness." "When the hope of your good perished, then search, inquire and imagine another." "Idleness is the image of death, and the idle, of the dead man." "Wisdom has a taste and smell of God." "In solitude is what is often lost in the conversation." "The weapons of death and adverse fortune are the sorrows and sorrows that man takes" and "The magnanimous, the more he can, the less he comes."

And the second booklet, entitled "Vera philosophia de natura mitorum, hominis et mundi, antiquis occult", deals with a study on the nature of myths, men and the world, which is hidded the ancients (further information on this book can be expanded in [2] and [17].

Moving on the life of Sabuco again, after the death of her husband, she and her son Pablo, probably due to the serious economic problems that arose at the death of Acacio, left Alcaraz to settle in El Balletero, in 1636, where Pablo was appointed priest, a position in which he would remain until 1650. El Balletero was a small village that in 1631 only had 82 families instead of the 800 of Alcaraz and a single parish church unlike the five ones and four convents of Alcaraz [7]. However, that was a good place since it was the most populous village of Alcaraz's dependents, nearby, just three leagues from it and also enjoyed some prosperity, which undoubtedly satisfied Pablo's ambition, given that his church had the benefit of a few small towns, such as San Miguel de Susaña and Villalgordo, with the small farmhouse of El Zarzalejo [1].

Sabuco spent the last years of her life in El Balletero (nine, according to [20]), although it is not clear if she died there or in Madrid, where other sources place that event (with it follows the lack of knowledge about her life, because this data is not contrasted either), a date that also causes a lot of controversy, since it is 1622, for several sources and after 1645, for others, [19], for example. The latter is based on the fact that Sabuco is identified in that year as a witness to the statements about family genealogy made by some of her grandchildren. According to [20], she is buried in the Parish of the convent of Santo Domingo de Alcaraz, one of the main ones in that time. In it, Sabuco bought a chapel, inaugurated with her husband's funeral, ordering in her will that her remains also rest there.

As curiosities and anecdotes concerning her, the following can be commented.

- The Women Institute of the City of Albacete gave the name of "Oliva Sabuco" to the Illustrious Women of Castilla-La Mancha Encyclopedia, created with the aim of making visible all those women who contributed with their contributions to the progress of the region and society in general and that, until now, have been invisible.
- The current Secondary Education Institute of Albacete is named IE.S. Historic Bachelor Sabuco, in honor of Oliva Sabuco's father.
- Two entities, named "Forum Oliva Sabuco" of Castilla-La Mancha and "Sociedad Oliva Sabuco", respectively, have been created in Spain, both with the purpose of promoting the study and dissemination of the work "New Philosophy of the Nature of Man ..." [18]. The second one also aims to fight against all forms of intellectual discrimination against women [10].

These societies have conducted a calligraphic study of the firms of Oliva Sabuco and her father to confirm, according to them, that Oliva Sabuco was the true author of the "New Philosophy." This study can be seen in the following Figure 4 (text in Spanish)



Figure 4: Real signatures of Sabuco and her father, the Bachelor Miguel Sabuco

- María Colomer Vintró, together with Mary Ellen Waithe and C. Ángel Zorita published the first English edition of the work: «New Philosophy of Human Nature: Neither Known to Nor Attained by the Great Ancient Philosophers, Which Will Improve Human Life and Health» at the University of Illinois in 2006 [20].

- In April 2007, the I Oliva Sabuco International Congress was held in Alcaraz (see Figure 5).

- In the Spanish movie "Fermat's room", first opera by the directors Luis Piedrahita and Rodrigo Sopena in 2007, four mathematicians face various problems of logic, anonymously and under the pseudonyms of different scientists. The mathematical woman carries the pseudonym of Oliva Sabuco [10].



Figure 5: Announcer Poster of the I Oliva Sabuco International Congress

- At the world congress of “Women's Worlds 2008”, held at the Complutense University of Madrid from July 3 to 9, 2008, Rosalía Romero Pérez presented the book entitled “Oliva Sabuco [1562-1620]” [10]. Figure 6 shows the opening ceremony of that event.



Figure 6: Opening Ceremony of the Women's Worlds 2008 Conference

- In December 2008, Juan Ricardo González López published a book entitled “El enigma Sabuco (I)” (on the cover of the book, he figures only as Ricardo González, as it can be seen in Figure 7), in which according to Andrés García Cerdán, Professor of Language and Literature [8],

Things are put in place and it is definitely demolished, with a stroke of enthusiasm and dedication, so much imposture and so much misogynist complex.



Figure 7: Cover of the book “El enigma Sabuco”.

- On November 28 and 29, 2008, the “II Oliva Sabuco International Congress and her New Philosophy” was held in Albacete, which had a large number of participants [10]-[15].

Virginia Ferrer published "Recuerda mundo", an ecological novel about Sabuco, which takes place in her homeland, edited in Barcelona by Editorial Sirpus, in the “Techo de Cristal” collection [6]-[23].

- Jesús Ruiz Fernández gave a lecture entitled "The necessary philosophy and the best and highest fruit for man" on "The Philosophy" in Madrid, on February 13, 2015 [24].

- In 2016, the writer José María Merino wrote a book about her in the Alfaguara Editorial entitled "Tenth Muse". In it, one can read

Oliva Sabuco (Figure 8), a native of Alcaraz (Albacete), is one of the most brilliant feathers of the Golden Age and at the same time one of the most ignored. Lope de Vega called her “Tenth Muse” [25].



Figure 8: A recreación de Oliva Sabuco

3. Author’s reflections

As it has been clearly reflected in the text, there are many incompatibilities in the various sources consulted on dates and relevant data in the life of Oliva Sabuco. This is an aspect that should be taken care of by the different authors of these sources, who should reliably contrast their writings, so that they do not lead to error or cause confusion among the readers.

But if this is serious, much more it is, still, not even having certainty of the real existence of a person on whom it is written. This happens all too often in the literature, especially when the sources deal

with characters that were supposed to have lived in the Middle Ages or in earlier times. This occurs, for example, with the case of “Fatima de Madrid”.

For some sources, Fatima de Madrid (Figure 9) is a myth, that is, she simply did not exist. However, for others, Fatima de Madrid, born in Madrid between the 10th and 11th century (there is no record of the exact date of her birth), was the daughter of the Spanish-born astronomer, philosopher, polygraph and mathematician Maslama al-Mayriti (whose name means “man from Madrid”), born in that city in the middle of the 10th century and died in Córdoba between 1007 and 1008, who became known as the “Euclid of Spain”.



Figure 9: A picture of ¿Fátima de Madrid?

For the sources that defend her existence, Fatima de Madrid was a remarkable Muslim astronomer of the 10th century, who presumably lived in Córdoba at the time of the Caliphate (who lived moments of great splendor in that century), who worked with her father in important astronomical and mathematical investigations, learning to measure the height of the stars on the horizon. On these observations she wrote the well-known “Fatima Corrections”. She also made corrections to the "Almagesto" by Ptolemy, translated with her father the Persian years to Arabs and determined the average positions of the planets for the first day of the Hegira. Both are also recognized for works on calendars, calculations of the true positions of the Sun, Moon and planets, sinus and tangent tables, spherical astronomy, astrological tables, parallax calculations, eclipses and visibility of the Moon. Her work entitled "Treaty of the astrolabe", about the use of this instrument, is still preserved in the library of the Monastery of the Escorial, contrary to "The corrections of Fatima", a work that cannot be found in old libraries or with the help of experts archivists For all these “presumption reasons”, Fatima was included in the “Astronomers that made history” calendar, created in 2009 on the occasion of the International Year of Astronomy (see [26] for the latter and [13] for further information).

So, what, then, is the author's opinion regarding the characteristics, skills and official qualifications of Oliva Sabuco?

To start, apothecary seems clear that she was not, at least in the legal sense of the word, although some sources consider so, probably because of the pharmaceutical knowledge found in "The New Philosophy." In fact, although several sources do guarantee it, as we will see below, it cannot even be ensured that her father, Miguel Sabuco was (Oliva Sabuco's paternal grandfather, of the same name as his son, was a dyer by profession).

Regarding Miguel Sabuco's apothecary condition, in [20] it can be read a paragraph by [16], in which this author indicates the following:

In the year 1645, Juan de Buitrago, interrogated in the probation of Gabriel Pareja said "having met Miguel Sabuco himself. I do not remember his own name, only that he was an apothecary in this city [Alcaraz], and I know that he was brother of father and mother of the mentioned Maria Sabuco de Peñarrubia and neighbor of this city".

According to José Marco [10], Bachelor Sabuco was an apothecary. A seat in the Account Book dated October 4, 1572, indicated the release delivered to the poor". By the way, Pretel [14] finds in that same book a reference to Alonso Sabuco, son of Miguel and also an apothecary, who collects several payments for the same concept.

However, Miguel and Alonso were not the only apothecaries of Alcaraz at that time. Cano found the contract that the Alcaraceño Council made with foreign professionals such as Sancho Vélez or Baltasar de Ydiota [4]. The latter, who worked in Chinchilla, is called by the Council, according to an agreement of December 4, 1572, "for being this city devoid of apothecary." However, aside from the folio, it is said: "Let an apothecary come to this city called Martín de Meota". In 1573 two new apothecaries arrive in Alcaraz, Juan de Arabia and Juan García de Denia [14]).

As it can be seen, therefore, no reference in the literature to the fact that Sabuco was an apothecary.

For a better understanding, Figure 10 shows the family tree of the Sabuco's family, although it is convenient to note that these genealogies are very complex, since data belong to witness information that sometimes presents contradictory ideas or memories.

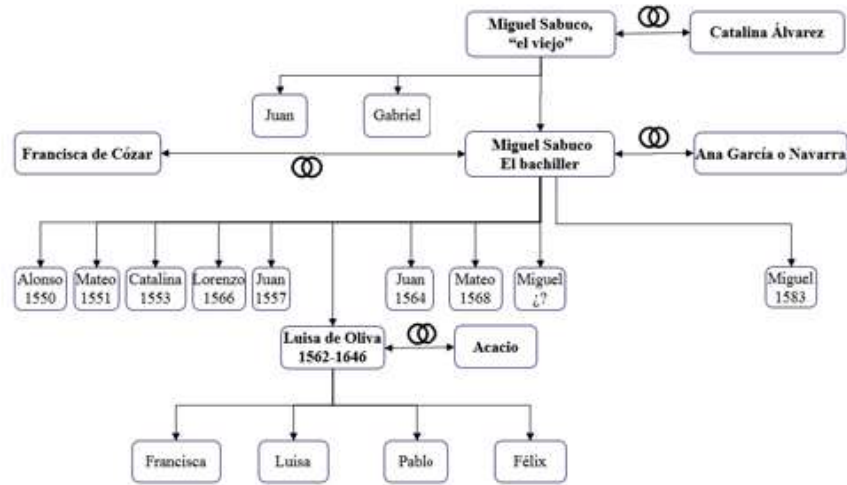


Figure 10: Genealogical tree of the Sabuco family

Certainly, it cannot be said that Sabuco possessed the characteristic attributed to her by some sources of being mathematical. Except in wikipedia, no other source grants such a distinction, which could be explained only by the appearance of some mathematical concepts in "The New Philosophy."

And finally, with respect to the characteristics of being a philosopher and scholar, the author believes that with them happens the same as what happened with the apothecary. It does seem proven that his father was a Bachelor, because according to [9]

Miguel Sabuco, a native of Alcaraz, who studied in the course of 1543 at the University of Alcalá, since the other neighbors who have the same name are never mentioned with any degree, or a bachelor's degree, ranges that always preceded the name in case of being owned.

There is no record in any source that Sabuco reached the title of Bachelor, which makes it impossible to attribute to her the status of philosopher, in the legal sense of the word. And referring to being a scholar, this is perhaps a characteristic that could be attributed to her, as long as she is recognized as the author of "The New Philosophy", given the great flow of knowledge of which the work is impregnated, and all of this despite the fact that, as already indicated, it is not firmly stated in any source that Sabuco was studying, except as regards her attendance at the gatherings her father organized in Alcaraz and the fact that she also had access to important libraries of Alcaraz, like that of her godfather, Doctor Heredia.

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